

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4591

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SUBJECT: TOWN BOARD ELECTIONS IN BELIZE

REF: BELIZE 0845

1. SUMMARY. PREMIER PRICE'S PARTY WON CONTROL OF FOUR OUT OF SEVEN PRINCIPAL TOWNS IN BELIZE IN DEC 22 ELECTIONS AS COMPARED TO SIX OUT OF SEVEN IN 1972. THIS RESULT CONSTITUTES NEITHER THE STRONG POPULAR ENDORSEMENT THE GOVERNMENT PARTY HAD HOPED FOR NOR THE OVERWHELMING REPUDIATION OF PRICE WHICH THE OPPOSITION HAD CONFIDENTLY PREDICTED. GOVERNMENT LOSSES IN TOLEDO, WHERE THE GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN THE RECENT UK-GUATEMALA DISPUTE WAS AN ISSUE, SEEM LIKELY TO MILITATE AGAINST GOB RECEPTIVENESS TO ANY CESSION OF BELIZEAN TERRITORY AS PART OF A SETTLEMENT TO THE DISPUTE.

2. IN THE DEC 22 TOWN BOARD ELECTIONS IN SEVEN OF BELIZE'S PRINCIPAL TOWNS (EXCLUDING BELIZE CITY WHERE ELECTIONS WERE HELD LAST YEAR) THE PEOPLES' UNITED PARTY (PUP), PREMIER PRICE'S PARTY, WON CONTROL OF THE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS IN FOUR TOWNS, THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC PARTY (UDP), THE PRINCIPAL OPPOSITION

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PARTY, IN TWO AND THE COROZAL UNITED FRONT (CUF), A PARTY

SUPPORTED BY THE ASSOCIATION OF CANE FARMERS AND AFFILIATED WITH UDP, IN ONE. ORDINARILY, THESE ELECTIONS ARE FOUGHT LARGELY ON LOCAL ISSUES, BUT IN THE WAKE OF THE RECENT INTENSIFICATION OF THE UK-GUATEMALA DISPUTE, IT HAS BEEN APPARENT THAT, TO AN UNUSUAL EXTENT, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS WOULD AFFECT THE VOTERS' DECISIONS. INDIVIDUAL RESULTS OF THE ELECTIONS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

A. IN PUNTA GORDA TOWN (TOLEDO DISTRICT), A PREVIOUSLY ALL PUP TOWN BOARD WAS REPLACED BY AN ALL UDP BOARD (7-0). COMMENT: CHARGES THAT FORMER PUP MAYOR ALEJANDRO VERNON WAS PRO-GUATEMALA ARE SAID TO HAVE BEEN WIDELY BELIEVED IN TOLEDO, AND THIS WAS PROBABLY THE MAIN REASON FOR THE PUP'S DEFEAT IN PUNTA GORDA TOWN.

B. IN MONKEY RIVER TOWN (TOLEDO DISTRICT), A PREVIOUSLY ALL PUP BOARD WAS REPLACED BY AN ALL UDP BOARD (7-0). COMMENT: AS WAS THE CASE IN PUNTA GORDA, CHARGES THAT THE PUP WAS CONSIDERING CESSION OF TOLEDO DISTRICT TO GUATEMALA FIGURED PROMINENTLY IN THE PRE-ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN AND PROBABLY CONTRIBUTED TO PUP'S DEFEAT.

C. IN COROZAL TOWN (DISTRICT OF COROZAL), A PREVIOUSLY ALL PUP BOARD WAS REPLACED BY AN ALL CUF BOARD (7-0). COMMENT: GOVERNMENT'S POOR PERFORMANCE IN CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE OF ROADS APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN THE PRINCIPAL ISSUE.

D. IN ORANGE WALK TOWN (DISTRICT OF ORANGE WALK), A PREVIOUSLY ALL PUP BOARD WAS OVERWHELMINGLY CONFIRMED IN OFFICE. COMMENT: POPULARITY OF MAYOR LEOPOLDO BRICENO APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN THE MAIN FACTOR IN PUP'S VICTORY (7-0).

E. IN DANGRIGA (STANN CREEK DISTRICT), A PREVIOUSLY ALL PUP BOARD WAS CONFIRMED (6-1). COMMENT: SUPERIOR CALIBRE OF PUP CANDIDATES APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN THE DOMINANT FACTOR.

F. IN BENQUE VIEJO DEL CARMEN (DISTRICT OF CAYO), THE PUP WON CONFIRMATION (7-0) OF ITS PREVIOUS CONTROL OF TOWN BOARD.

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G. IN SAN IGNACIO TOWN (CAYO), THE PUP REPLACED A PREVIOUS ALL UDP BOARD WITH ONE WHICH IS PREDOMINANTLY (6-1) PUP. COMMENT: THIS, PLUS PUP VICTORY IN BENQUE VIEJO, WERE ESPECIALLY DISAPPOINTING TO UDP WHERE LATTER WAS UNEQUIVOCALLY PREDICTING VICTORY BECAUSE OF SUPPOSED UNPOPULARITY OF LEFTIST VIEWS OF ATTORNEY GENERAL ASSAD SHOMAN WHOSE HOME IS IN SAN IGNACIO.

3. COMMENT. AS REGARDS PREMIER PRICE'S DOMESTIC POLITICAL

POSITION, ELECTION RESULTS FAILED TO CORROBORATE OFT-HEARD VIEW THAT PREMIER'S POPULARITY WAS ON THE WANE. WHAT COMFORT UDP HAS BEEN ABLE TO DRAW FROM ITS VICTORIES IN TOLEDO AND SUCCESS OF ITS CUF ALLY IN COROZAL HAS BEEN SUBSTANTIALLY OFFSET BY ITS REVERSAL IN SAN IGNACIO AND FAILURE OF PREDICTED COUNTRYWIDE PROTEST VOTE AGAINST PRICE GOVERNMENT TO MATERIALIZE. ON THE OTHER HAND, PUP COULD NOT CREDIBLY PORTRAY ELECTION OUTCOME AS AN UNQUALIFIED ENDORSEMENT OF PRICE BY BELIZEAN VOTERS.

4. COMMENT. ONLY CLEAR IMPLICATIONS ELECTION RESULTS CONTAINED FOR UK-GUATEMALAN DISPUTE WERE SEEN IN PUP REVERSES IN TOLEDO WHERE OPPOSITION WAS ABLE TO CONVINCE VOTERS PUP WAS SOFTENING IN ITS ATTITUDE TOWARD GUATEMALA.

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